

MEMORANDUM

TO: Members, Higher Education Strategic Master Plan Work Group
Members, Higher Education Coordinating Board
Higher Education Stakeholders

FROM: Representative Phyllis Gutierrez-Kenney
Senator Don Carlson
Co-Chairs, Higher Education Strategic Master Plan Work Group

DATE: July 22, 2003

SUBJECT: **Summary of July 7, 2003 Work Group Discussion**

Attached below is a summary of the July 7 discussion between members of the Work Group, the Higher Education Coordinating Board, and the higher education community.

This summary reflects the dialog that occurred at the meeting and is intended to provide guidance from the Work Group as a whole to the HECB in its further development of the 2004 Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education.

Members of the Work Group, and the higher education community, will have additional conversations and discussion about the themes presented in this summary. This, however, represents a beginning point for those discussions.

Higher Education Strategic Master Plan Work Group Policy Direction for the 2004 Strategic Master Plan

Summary of July 7, 2003 Work Group Discussion

On July 7, 2003, the Higher Education Strategic Master Plan Work Group (created by ESHB 2076) convened a roundtable discussion focused on the following questions:

- What topics should be addressed in the strategic master plan?
- What does the state expect from higher education for its citizens?
- What are the state's top priorities for higher education over the next five to ten years?

What follows is a synopsis of the discussion, organized by major theme. This synopsis is intended to provide legislative guidance and policy direction to the Higher Education Coordinating Board in its development of the 2004 strategic master plan for higher education. An interim report is due December 15, 2003.

1) Access

- The strategic master plan should contain projections for how many students the state will need to serve within various future timeframes and in what fields instructional capacity will be needed.
- The plan should examine the effectiveness of transfer to the four-year institutions to ensure that sufficient capacity is available for transfer students.
- The plan should also examine whether current policies are adequate regarding students' responsibility to complete degree and certificate programs in a timely fashion so that limited resources benefit as many students as possible.

The looming challenge of providing sufficient access to higher education to meet demand from increasing numbers of potential students threatens to overwhelm all other issues. It causes us to question whether our previous assumptions about higher education can continue unchallenged. For example, can we afford our open-door policy at the community and technical colleges? Can we continue significant over-enrollment at all of our institutions?

If we are trying to provide "access to all," we must clearly justify this goal (and the additional funding needed to accomplish it). If not, we must manage student and parent expectations to avoid false hopes.

2) Funding

- The plan should include recommendations for changing how the state funds higher education.

- The plan should reflect coordination and integration of planning, policy decisions, and operating and capital funding.

Funding is the close corollary to access: one cannot be accomplished without the other. In addition to considering total funding for higher education, however, we must examine how the current funding methodology creates incentives and disincentives and drives institutional behavior. If the state has an interest in expanding high cost programs, for example, continuing to fund enrollment based on an average cost per student might not accomplish this goal.

We must also gain a better understanding of what it takes to produce the end product: a degreed student. Current information about the marginal cost of adding new enrollment is not sufficient.

3) Service Delivery Models

- The strategic master plan should include recommendations for how higher education services should be delivered and by which institutions. Service delivery should reflect the distinct roles and missions of the higher education institutions.
- In developing the recommendations, the HECB should consider the changing nature of service delivery, such as distance learning and off-campus center models, and the changing nature of the student population, including mid-career and placebound students.

To be useful, the strategic master plan must provide guidance to the institutions as they develop and implement programs. The plan should also be revisited periodically as circumstances change. In planning for the future, the HECB should not be constrained by how education is currently delivered, but look for different alternatives and options. The HECB should also factor in the costs and efficiencies of various service delivery models.

4) Higher Education and Economic Development

- The strategic master plan should recommend ways for the state and institutions to be more responsive to the needs of employers seeking trained individuals in particular high demand fields.
- The plan must recognize that higher education has multiple purposes--academic, economic, and civic--and seek to strike a balance among them.
- The recommendations should reflect the different roles and missions of institutions and higher education sectors.
- The plan should suggest options for the state to support the research mission of higher education, as it pertains to economic development.

5) Accountability

- The strategic master plan should recommend specific indicators of institutional performance that can be reported and monitored, along with reporting timelines. The indicators should reflect the state's priorities but avoid micromanagement of institutions. Fiscal responsibility and cost management should be among the performance indicators.
- The plan should also identify the types of information needed from institutions to assure consistent and comparable reporting.

The Legislature and the public expect higher education institutions to continually improve and become more efficient. We need assurance, for example, that obsolete programs are not consuming space and resources or that barriers do not inhibit students wishing to transfer between institutions. The HECB and the institutions should identify appropriate indicators of success in meeting the state's goals.

At the same time, more work should be done to describe and then measure the desired outcomes of a higher education – not merely the gaining of a degree or a job after graduation – but the value-added of creating a better educated citizenry.

6) Learning as a Lifelong Continuum: P-16 and Beyond

- The strategic master plan should recommend strategies to increase the connections between the state's postsecondary and K-12 education systems. Options include improved communication and better alignment of assessment, entry and exit requirements, and curriculum. The importance of counseling at both the K-12 and postsecondary levels should be recognized.
- The plan should consider options for expanding dual credit options for students, to provide students with alternatives but also to reduce enrollment pressures.

What happens in our schools influences what happens in our colleges and universities. Not only are we expecting the state's largest high school graduating class in 2008, but those students will have experienced education reform with standards-based learning and assessment. We anticipate these students will be better prepared, but we must also take active steps to reduce the need for remediation.

At the same time, what happens in colleges and universities, particularly regarding entrance requirements, has a strong influence on high schools. Students and their parents would benefit from improved communication about expectations, as would high school counselors.

7) Financial Aid

- A central purpose of the strategic master plan continues to be recommendations and strategies for assuring that as many students as possible can afford access to higher education.

The HECB and Legislature have remained firmly committed to affordability over the years, providing additional funding for financial aid to keep pace with rising tuition for the neediest students.

8) Overall Structure of Strategic Master Plan

- The strategic master plan must represent a balance between what higher education in Washington “should” be and what it “can” be, given resource constraints.
- The plan should be both visionary and realistic, permitting the Legislature to make difficult choices and set priorities. Options should be provided that allow the Legislature to know the consequences of one choice over another.

Fundamentally, we do not want a strategic master plan that sits on a shelf. To avoid this, the plan must be relevant and contain concise, clear recommendations. It must provide a vision, but present its strategies and recommendations in phases and incremental steps. It must include benchmarks and methods for monitoring and accountability. As the Legislature makes policy and budget decisions, we can use the plan to debate priorities and tradeoffs. We will be informed about the consequences of those decisions. We will also be able to monitor our progress.